

JOINT FINANCE COMMITTEE HEARING
FISCAL YEAR 2023 BUDGET



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DIVISION FOR THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED
Department of Health and Social Services
February 22, 2022
Legislative Hall, Joint Finance Committee Hearing Room

Comments available online at <https://dhss.delaware.gov/>

Good Afternoon Senator Paradee, Representative Carson, members of the Joint Finance Committee, and members of the public.

I am Debbie Talley, the Director of the Division for the Visually Impaired.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today and present our accomplishments and the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 Governor's Recommended Budget.

DIVISION OVERVIEW

DVI MISSION

To provide educational, vocational, and technical support to empower and foster independence for Delawareans with visual impairments.



While DVI is small, the resources provided to nearly 3,300 Delawareans are life-altering. The things many sighted people take for granted, like reading a newspaper, going to work, or choosing an outfit, include layers of obstacles for people who are blind or visually impaired.

DVI SERVICES ACROSS THE LIFESPAN

CORE SERVICES

Education Services

- Itinerant educational model and Braille Instruction
- Birth to age 21

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)

- Individualized, comprehensive career preparation and placement

Independent Living Services/Older Blind Program (ILS/OIB)

- Maximize independence and aging in place



DVI provides education, training, and equipment that assist people to live independently throughout their life. I will do my best to quickly provide a summary of services.

Itinerant **Teachers of the Visually Impaired** provide educational instruction to school students statewide, ensuring they have Braille instruction, assistive technology, and accessible materials.

The **Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)** program provides career services to people as they prepare for, obtain and maintain employment.

Vision Rehabilitation Therapists teach adaptive techniques in homes and work to promote **Independent Living**.

DVI SERVICES ACROSS THE LIFESPAN

SUPPORT SERVICES

Assistive Technology (AT)

- Live or virtual AT support to maximize use of technology

Instructional Materials & Resource Center (IMRC)

- Production facility and library for accessible instructional materials for K-12 students
- The cost of purchasing a single book in Braille can range from \$2,500 to \$25,000

Orientation and Mobility (O&M)

- Instruction in traveling as independently as possible through home, school, community, or office environments



Assistive Technology (AT) trainers provide individual and group instruction, demonstrations, and worksite support.

The **Instructional Materials & Resource Center (IMRC)** converts materials, and maintains a library of AT, educational materials, and accessible schoolbooks.

And finally, our Certified **Orientation & Mobility (O&M)** specialists teach people to move independently throughout their homes, schools, community, and work environments.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- **Continuous Quality Improvement**
- **Stakeholder Engagement**
- **Covid-19 Response**
- **Increased Accessibility**



We are very proud of our accomplishments over the past year. I will do my best to summarize a few:

As part of a **continuous quality improvement** initiative, DVI completed strategic planning and are in the third quarter of implementation. Our goals are aligned with the Department's and include actions to address the social determinants of health. Additionally, members of leadership attended training to use logic models to evaluate program effectiveness. And finally, we worked closely with federal partners to develop best practices for reporting and strengthen policies to ensure sustainability.

Improving **stakeholder engagement** has been one of our top priorities. DVI, with help from the Office of Boards and Commissions, reconstituted the Vocational Rehabilitation Advisory Council in compliance with federal regulations, completed a comprehensive needs assessment, and jointly developed goals for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Combined State Plan.

During the early stages of the **COVID-19** vaccinations, DVI co-hosted two events and coordinated vaccines for consumers in their homes and at community events.

Finally, use of virtual platforms have greatly **increased accessibility** for people with visual impairments. For example, DVI workshop attendance increased 67% and the passage of Senate Bill 94, which allows for virtual public meetings, helped decrease transportation challenges and ultimately increased valuable input from our stakeholders.

LOOKING AHEAD

- **Assistive Technology**
- **Accessible Materials**
- **Workforce Challenges**
- **Continual Improvement**



And now for a look ahead - Too often, costs associated with **assistive technology** pose financial hardships that limit access to greater independence. This is particularly true with our senior population. More than 60% of the DVI registry are people aged 55 or older, most of whom lost their vision over time, from common eye diseases. DVI will continue to work to secure assistive technology resources and increase access to this critical need.

As mentioned, DVI produces **accessible materials** for school students, through the twelfth grade. This is made possible through the efforts of the Men with A Message (MWM) Program, located at the James T. Vaughn Correctional Center. Twelve inmates, who are certified by the Library of Congress as Brailleists, convert hundreds of books per year. DVI is continually exploring creative ways to attract and maintain talent within the prison system so we may increase access to accessible materials.

Recruiting and retaining talent during the current labor market has been a challenge. Our vacancy rate has been as high as 23%. We have seen less applicants, fewer interviewees, and more rejected job offers for better wages elsewhere. Working with high staff turnover could lead to service gaps, decreased morale, and staff exhaustion. DVI will continue to find creative ways to recruit new employees while working with the Department for support.

And finally, DVI has experienced ongoing leadership turnover, which has resulted in opportunities for improvement for both engaging with our federal partners and our stakeholder community as a whole. We are fortunate to have talented employees and passionate advocates who sincerely care about Delawareans with visual impairments. We believe our dedicated engagement with our stakeholders, and solid strategic management are key components to assuring quality services and outcomes for the visually impaired community.

FY 2023 GOVERNOR'S RECOMMENDED BUDGET

FY 2023 Governor's Recommended Budget (\$ in thousands)

	GF	ASF	NSF	Total
FTEs	51.4	0	18.6	70
Dollars (\$)	\$5,365.0	\$1,050.0	\$1,484.0	\$7,899.0

Budget Definitions:

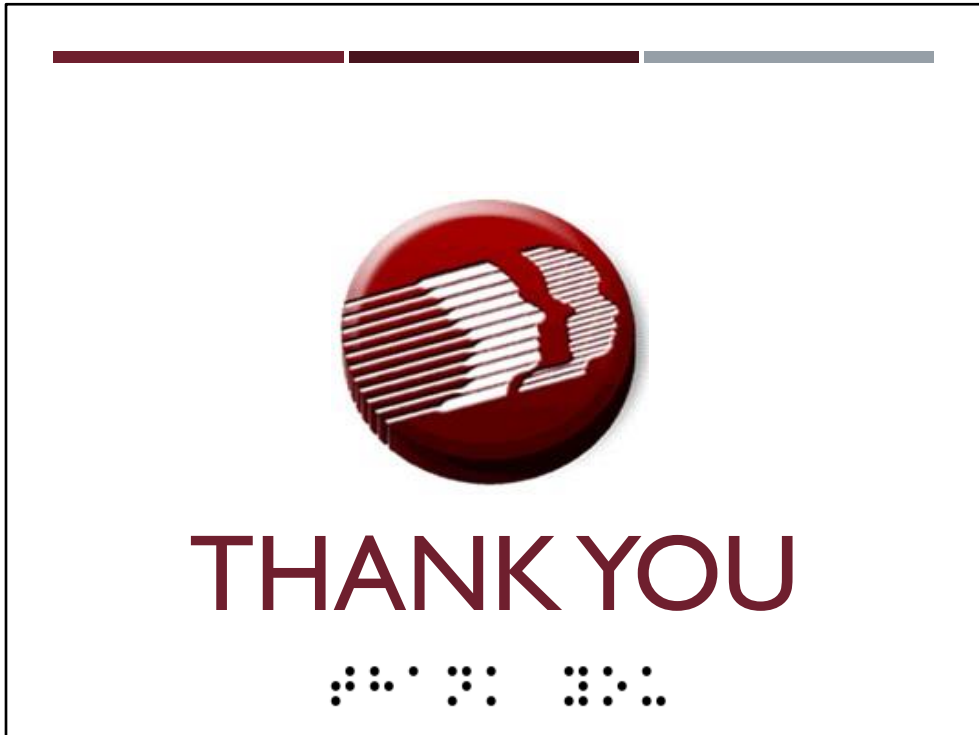
GF – General Funds
ASF – Appropriated Special Funds
NSF – Non-Appropriated Special Funds
FTEs – Full Time Equivalent Positions



The slide above shows DVI's budget included in the FY 2023 Governor's Recommended Budget (GRB).

Our Division's FY 2023 GRB is:

- \$5,365.0 [Five Million, Three Hundred Sixty-Five Thousand dollars] in General Funds (GF);
- \$1,050.0 [One Million, Fifty Thousand dollars] in Appropriated Special Fund (ASF) spending authority; and
- \$1,484.0 [One Million, Four Hundred Eighty-Four Thousand dollars] in Non-Appropriated Special Funds (NSF).



Thank you for the opportunity to share with you the challenges and opportunities facing the Division for the Visually Impaired.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have.